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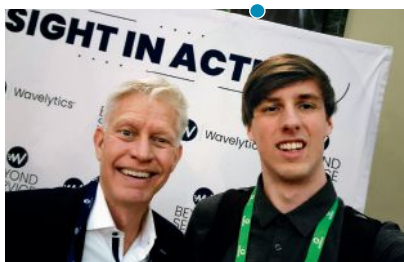
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[DID YOU MAKE THE CUT?]

2026 LM150 applications are open!

We're still taking applications for our yearly LM150, a list of the largest landscaping companies ranked by annual revenue. We encourage companies with \$10 million or more in revenue to complete the entry form at bit.ly/4kZkmYc.



The list will appear in the June edition of LM. Contact special projects editor Marisa Palmieri (mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net) with questions about the list or applications.

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Deep in my heart, Texas

I'm not from Texas, but I have a special bond with the state. My wife grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, so for the last 20-plus years, our family has made the drive from Lawrence, Kan., to McAllen or South Padre Island to visit her late father and his wife. It's a 15-hour drive, so we've made frequent overnight stops in Dallas, Waco, Austin and San Antonio.

A Texas flag proudly flies in the Hall of Justice, my garage-turned-sports-bar. When I'm grilling, I'm probably in a "Come and Take It" apron I bought at Buc-ee's, as I remember the Alamo.

My 2026 got off to a quick start, with back-to-back trips to the Lone Star State. First, it was the Executive Retreat, hosted by Jeffrey Scott in Fort Worth. Then, three weeks later, I was in Dallas at GROW! 2026, hosted by The Grow Group. Both events had many friendly, familiar faces and tons of highlights. My notebook was overwhelmed with cat-scratches of great sound bites and nuggets for readers of *LM*.

At the Executive Retreat, Jeffrey Scott advised attendees that it was time to reset and look forward. "What lessons can we learn from 2025? You have to say OK, here is where I should have turned left instead of right. That's behind you. You have to look ahead."

Karen Siciliano, former president of Siciliano Landscape, now retired, stood out as a speaker. Her one-hour presentation lasted a little more than 30 minutes, then she opened it up for a question-and-answer session. Her honesty and directness made her stand out. She told one attendee that she realizes now, in hindsight, that she tried too hard to please her famous clients.

"Ten years ago, Chris and Gene opened the doors to attendees from around the country, not quite knowing exactly what they were getting themselves into. In 2026 ... attendees visited a Complete Landsculpture that had tripled in size."

She told another person that her most valuable advice was to "remove the impediments to your growth to achieve success for you and your clients."

Three weeks later, I was in Big D for GROW! 2026, which was held at Complete Landsculpture. Regular readers of *LM* will recognize Chris Strempek, CEO and founder, and Gene Freeman, vice president, of Complete — they're fun semi-regulars on our *LM* Gallery page (and they're back there again this month!) and they were also featured on our cover in a tumultuous 2020.

This GROW! was especially noteworthy because it was the first GROW! to feature a repeat host. Ten years ago, Chris and Gene opened the doors to attendees from around the country, not quite knowing exactly what they were getting themselves into. In 2016, the event welcomed 250 attendees to a modest hotel and a modest Complete Landsculpture. In 2026, more than 1,000 attendees stayed at the downtown Hyatt Regency Dallas and visited a Complete Landsculpture that had tripled in size (No. 130 on the 2025 *LM*150 list of largest landscape and

lawn care companies in the industry, with \$27.5 million in revenue).

I asked Marty Grunder, CEO of the Grow Group and founder of Grunder Landscaping Co., about the journey Complete Landsculpture has been on, and he told me that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

"(For Complete Landsculpture) it's been a lot of blocking and tackling, it's been a lot of hustling, it's been a lot of doing what they said they were going to do and going out and getting it," Grunder told me. "If you hustle, you get back to people, you go for it, you're nice to your people, you're a leader ... it makes the organization better. They're bigger, but a lot of the same principles they used to start the business, they're using them today."

Gene was on stage when he pondered how things had changed over the last 10 years for their business. He had one regret — he wished he could have hosted GROW! 20 years ago to better jumpstart the business.

"For the young entrepreneurs here, the access you have today, that we didn't have back then, to education and a peer network is priceless," he said. "I wish we could have had all this 20 years ago. If we had access to this information, this knowledge base back then? We'd be twice as big as we are today."

They say everything is bigger in Texas. I say everything is bigger — including the opportunity — in this great industry we serve. 🤠

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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

What new tools or technologies have had the most meaningful impact on your business in the past few years?

"GPS tracking and routing software have been huge for efficiency. It helps us keep our crews tight and reduces fuel/labor costs significantly."



Landscape Professionals

Bryan Christiansen
Mariani Premier Group
Lake Bluff, Ill.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley
Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Giese
Perfecturf Lawn Care
Mt. Pleasant, Wisc.

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Max Moreno
Nexus Management Solutions
Menifee, Calif.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Justin White
K&D Landscaping
Watsonville, Calif.

"One product we use daily is PropertyIntel. The time savings and speed it provides for takeoffs, designs, client recommendations and crew mapping have improved our efficiency, clarity and ability to deliver a more streamlined experience for both clients and team members."



"We're leveraging AI-driven tools to improve candidate vetting, automate pre-screening and model five-year organizational plans for landscape companies. The measurable gain has been faster hiring cycles, stronger leadership retention and fewer costly hiring missteps."



"Artificial intelligence (AI) has completely changed how we do things at K&D. The largest shift has come at the leadership team level, where we have helped each leader create an AI assistant to analyze data, organize decision-making and streamline communication. As more of our team becomes optimized with AI coworkers, I am confident our average employee income will grow quickly."

"My team is discovering new opportunities every day to integrate artificial intelligence into our business processes."



Industry Consultants

Tito Caceres
Bloom Talent Solutions
Coral Gables, Fla.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.

"The biggest impact has come from fully leveraging Aspire as our operating system and integrating AI-driven automation across marketing, sales and operations. That's given us clearer data for better decisions and driven company-wide efficiency."



OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* shares a comprehensive mix of content designed to stimulate growth and take our readers to their next level.

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LM GALLERY

Check out a few of the places where the **LM** team made its rounds recently

1 Aspiring to greatness GROW! 2026 in Dallas brought out the best in the industry, including Aspire Software general manager Eli Zevin (center), who took time out of his schedule to snap a photo with **LM**'s Seth Jones (left) and Scott Hollister.



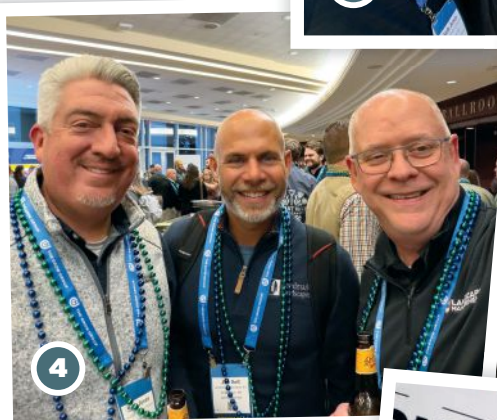
2 Dinner date The North Coast Media team met up with their friends representing Syngenta during the GCSAA conference in Orlando. From left are Jones; Tessa Figueroa, G&S Business Communications; Hollister; Mark LaFleur, Syngenta; Lyndsey Newnam, G&S; Lindsay Ruscak, G&S; Stephanie Schwenke, Syngenta; Jim Cummins, North Coast Media; and Carson Cashwell, Syngenta.



3 Complete crew Jones and Hollister grabbed a selfie with the co-owners of Complete Landsculpture in Dallas — Chris Strempek (left) and Gene Freeman. Complete Landsculpture opened its doors to attendees at GROW! 2026 as the event's host company.



4 North Texas Mardi Gras One of the receptions during GROW! 2026 in Dallas celebrated the Mardi Gras season. Here, Jones and Hollister catch up with Joe Sell from Landmark Landscapes in Sheboygan, Wis.



5 Friends of LM GROW! 2026 was packed full of official Friends of **LM**, including regular contributors to the magazine. Jones is pictured here with columnist Phil Harwood (left) and Tabettha Vetter, both with Tamarisk Business Advisors.



6 Service with a smile **LM** was invited to take part in WorkWave's annual Beyond Service Conference, which took place in Dallas. The magazine's Nathan Mader (right) interviewed and snapped this photo with WorkWave CEO Kevin Kemmerer.



PROZISION

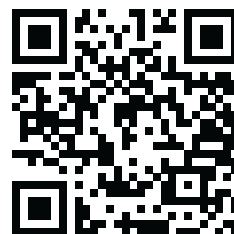
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Learn more at <https://powerequipment.honda.com/zero-turn-mowers>



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HONDA

All grown up

GROW! 2026 packs 'em in for a return visit to Dallas and Complete Landsculpture **BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

If GROW! in Dallas had a familiar ring to it, you're not making things up.

A decade ago, the annual conference for landscape professionals put on by Marty Grunder, founder and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. in Dayton, Ohio, and The Grow Group, took place in North Texas, with Complete Landsculpture serving as host and welcoming attendees for a full tour of its facilities.

Fast forward to this February, and GROW! 2026 returned to Dallas and Complete Landsculpture, co-owned by Chris Strempeck and Gene Freeman. But that's pretty much where the similarities between 2016 and this year end.

"The scope is totally different. We had 250 people at that GROW! back in 2016, and we have over 1,000 here this year. Chris and Gene have tripled the size of their business since then, too.

So much has changed," says Grunder. "But the more things change, the more they stay the same. A lot of the same principles that Complete Landsculpture used when they got the business started, they're still using today.

"And no matter what size the companies are that are attending GROW!, they're getting similar applicable lessons. ... We are landscapers, putting on an event for landscapers, and I think that's what makes the difference. That has always helped us create an event that other landscapers really want to be at."

Just like 10 years ago, the in-depth tour of Complete Landsculpture was the anchor for this edition of GROW! Attendees absorbed information on everything from sales and operations to company culture and fleet management. The event also featured keynote addresses, a full slate of classroom education and product exhibitions from GROW!'s partners.



Marty Grunder (left) and Chris Psencik with McFarlin Stanford deliver one of the main stage presentations at GROW! 2026 in Dallas.

GROW! 2026 wasn't a first for Jim Ciamillo, the owner of Landscape Pros Management in Fort Myers, Fla.; he'd attended on three previous occasions. And he said the business lessons learned in Dallas were similar to those earlier events and validated his reason for attending.

"One of our core values as a company is development, always learning better ways and better things to implement," Ciamillo says. "So, coming here, learning a lot of new strategies, a lot of new techniques, and seeing a lot of the openness and willingness to educate our industry is phenomenal." 📸

SCHILL MAKES ACQUISITIONS IN MICHIGAN, PENNSYLVANIA

Schill Grounds Management has acquired Begonia Brothers Services and Atlas Outdoor, marking its expansion into southeast Michigan and strengthening its ability to serve commercial clients with multi-site properties. These are Schill's first acquisitions in Michigan.

Also, Schill has acquired Brogan Landscaping, a landscape maintenance and design/build provider serving southeastern Pennsylvania for more than 25 years.

Begonia Brothers Services brings nearly 30 years of experience providing landscaping, lawn care, snow removal and related services throughout southeast Michigan. Led by owners Peter and

Ann Bonde and founder and commercial division leader Mike McDonald, the company serves both residential communities and commercial properties across the metro Detroit and Northville areas. The company employs 45 team members.

Atlas Outdoor, founded in 2011 by Sam and Brandi Gembel, provides landscaping, lawn care and snow services with branches in Flint and the greater Detroit area. The company employs more than 110 team members.

As part of the partnership, Sam and Brandi Gembel will remain actively involved in Atlas Outdoor, and Peter and Ann Bonde with Mike McDonald will continue to lead Begonia Brothers.

Equip Expo to begin two-city rotation in 2029

Equip Exposition, the international landscape, outdoor living and equipment trade show, has unveiled plans for a two-city rotation beginning in 2029.

Equip Exposition will be held at the Orlando County Convention Center in Orlando, Oct. 10-12, 2029, with future shows in central Florida in 2031 and 2033. The trade show will be in Louisville, Ky., in 2028, 2030 and 2032.

"This rotation gives our exhibitors and attendees the best of both worlds," says Kris Kiser, president of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, which owns and manages Equip. "Orlando has space for our members to host dealer meetings, provides additional co-location opportunities and offers expanded venue choice for exhibitor and attendee programming. The rotation also allows us to work with Louisville on enhancing their unique outdoor demo area —



An aerial view of the outdoor demo area at Equip Exposition in Louisville, Ky.

the only venue of its kind in the country."

The 2025 show in Louisville expanded to 1.2 million square feet and drew nearly 30,000 registered attendees from all 50 states and 52 countries, marking an attendance and net square footage record for the fourth year in a row.

"This planned two-city rotation builds on Equip's tremendous growth trajectory. Our transformation of Equip has unlocked enormous value for both attendees and exhibitors," Kiser says. "We've created a platform where industry professionals can see thousands of products, test real-world equipment and make critical business connections."

Equip 2026 will be held Oct. 20-23 in Louisville. To register for this year's show, visit [EquipExposition.com](https://www.EquipExposition.com). 

High-tech insights at WorkWave's Beyond Service

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The annual WorkWave Beyond Service Customer Conference once again brought industry pros, business owners and tech enthusiasts together for the fifth year.

The early February conference saw WorkWave customers from across the lawn care/landscaping, pest management, cleaning and security industries meet for four days of educational sessions, networking opportunities, partner booth visits and exceptional service in Dallas, Texas.

"Our goal in this conference is to enable our customers to get

the most out of our products, but also to get the most out of their business," says WorkWave CEO Kevin Kemmerer. "We want them to learn from us, but we also want them to learn from their peers."

And learning was certainly a top priority. After an initial welcome reception, the following three days were packed with keynote speakers (including one by world-renowned innovation strategist Shawn Kanungo), meetings with product managers and roughly 175 educational sessions with WorkWave experts and industry veterans.

Landscape industry classes covered all the essentials, including everything from software tips and tricks for WorkWave's RealGreen system to lessons on building company culture with RealGreen's founder, Joe Kucik. Women's industry sessions, Q&As, insights into WorkWave's future features and opportunities to provide feedback on the company's recent developments also took center stage.

GRANUM, WEATHERMATIC FORM PARTNERSHIP

Granum, the company behind LMN and Greenius, and Weathermatic, a global producer of smart irrigation solutions, formed a new multi-year strategic partnership designed to elevate contractor performance through aligned leadership, workforce development and industry education.

As part of the partnership, a new irrigation learning path has been released in Greenius, a seven-course training series designed to strengthen crew competency in specialty irrigation services. The new curriculum covers topics such as sprinklers, sensors, piping, pumps, water hammers and hydraulics. The training is available to Greenius customers and was featured throughout SmartCon, Weathermatic's annual partner conference, as part of the workforce excellence track.

LMN will also serve as the headline partner of SmartCon for the next three years.



Kanungo lead a presentation on the next generation of AI agents and how it can make the industry more efficient than ever before.

PHOTOS: OPEI (TOP), LM STAFF (BOTTOM)

WELCOME TO

The biggest breakthroughs in turf tech that are helping pros maintain their edge

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

David Reeves has been in the landscaping industry for about 30 years now, having worked a few different jobs for some of the largest companies in the business. Now, he's settled in the Dallas-Fort Worth area as the vice president of landscape maintenance at Site Landscape Development, a full-service commercial landscaping company focusing primarily on large warehouses and HOAs.

He's been a partner with John Deere for the past nine years, eight having been with the same dealer, five with the same rep and three of them with some extra direct support that allows Reeves to test the newest innovations John Deere has to offer.

"We're a pretty heavy tech-focused landscape company," he says. "Six years on Aspire at this point, our entire truck fleet is GPS — when we get our next set of mowers here, our entire fleet of mowers will be GPS."

As a company that has roughly 60 crews, 80 mowers, three Gator utility vehicles and more, Reeves says it's important to stay up to date with the latest trends in mower innovations, as well as the technology and software that keeps everything connected. By staying ahead of the curve, he's often saving thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours every time something new gets added to his operation.

So, whether it helps with saving labor, money, time or peace of mind, here are the most important innovations in mowers and turf equipment that landscape pros and industry experts like Reeves are talking about.

Automation is everywhere... almost

You've probably heard it all before — maybe even from the pages of *Landscape Management* a few times — but the advancements in automation and robotics for mowers is easily making this technology one of the hottest industry topics.

Lenny Mangnall, marketing product manager for Exmark, says autonomous mowers have changed

rapidly in the last few years, and he remembers how the technology started with small, wire-guided machines for homeowners. Now, it's become viable for landscapers to run them in their fleets for large properties.

"Today, it's kind of a boom, right? It seems like every month there's a new manufacturer coming to light with some level of autonomous mode," he says.

Exmark uses a "supervised autonomy" system with their Turf Tracer autonomous mowers, he explains, meaning the perimeter of a site is mowed manually, any exclusion/no-go zones are logged, and then the mower calculates the most efficient way to mow the property. And while this system isn't perfect — being more ideal for large, open turf areas and repeatable jobs — it shows how quickly autonomy has grown from the simple wire-guided bots in its early iterations.

Part of autonomy's fast-paced growth can be attributed to the technology trickling down from other industries, especially automotive and agriculture spaces. Robotic mowers have seen a similar trajectory, and one of the biggest developments with them is their size, now seeing them grow large enough to move away from the residential space and into commercial properties.

But while the power of multiple industries pushing this technology forward can mean that mower innovations happen sooner and with better efficiency, Mangnall also says landscapers should make sure they invest in trusted companies, especially ones that are able to provide landscaping-related support.

"It's not a roll-away piece of equipment that you're buying, it's a long-term investment," Mangnall says. "You just want to ensure that, if you purchase a piece of that equipment, that you're partnering with a company that is on stable ground and has real interest in the industry itself."

Continued on page 16

THE FUTURE



FLYING SOLO Autonomous mowers, such as Greenworks Commercial's OptimusZ, are becoming legitimate options for landscape contractors and lawn care pros.

Continued from page 14

Battery boosts

Another innovation that is starting to find its footing in the mower and turf equipment space is electrification, especially thanks to the improvements made to batteries and charging infrastructure.

Jeff Richlen, vice president of turf and consumer products at Briggs & Stratton and Ferris, says these improvements and their adoption into the industry have been driven by necessity. As more regions, municipalities and HOAs look to enforce zero-noise and zero-emissions goals, ensuring battery-powered technology can keep up with its gas counterparts has become a major motivator.

"If I've learned nothing else in my four years with the company, it's that (landscaping) is an industry that is very pragmatic in what it does, and it moves a little bit slower than, let's say, automotive as an example," Richlen says. "Therefore, if there's a need, and the technology or the advancements or the sophistication addresses that need, then you'll see it be adopted much faster."



Jeff Richlen

Caleb Myers, sales representative for Steel Green Manufacturing, agrees with that sentiment, and he says this desire for better batteries has seen Steel Green's electric spreader/sprayers become significantly more powerful and reliable.



Caleb Myers

"The battery packs that we're using now, we are incredibly confident in it," Myers says. "The original units we were testing, we'd have to put two, three, sometimes four batteries in one machine, whereas now they've developed one, larger battery that can withstand the performance that we need throughout a day."

Like autonomy, batteries in landscaping equipment have benefited from the innovations in other industries, but it also helps that companies like Briggs & Stratton have the capabilities to find their own improvements. Richlen says Briggs & Stratton has its own battery division, meaning they're able to tailor that technology to their own machines, ensuring it's optimized for the purpose of landscaping and mowing.

"Because we have our own battery systems, we benefit from having access to some of the best cells and cell chemistry and form factors in the world," Richlen says. "The products that we actually offer today and sell today, whether it be the batteries, the motors and the controllers ... they're very deliberate and purposeful in how they're produced for the application."

And as electrification continues to increase power, efficiency and runtimes, operators should see more benefits

outside of the standard noise and emissions reductions. Greenworks Commercial's Tony Marchese, senior vice president of sales, Commercial Business Group, Americas, says the maintenance on products like battery zero-turns are much lower than gas, leading to more uptime and significant productivity gains.

Labor shortages are another driving factor in improving battery technology, and Marchese says putting operators on newer electric machines is helping companies with employee retention.

"The progressive landscapers are attempting to draw in better operators, and one of the ways that they do that is by putting them on battery products, which at the end of the day, they're

far less fatigued," he says. "The amount of vibration, or the amount of noise that they must face on a gasoline zero-turn, is gone. And at the end of the day, they don't come home smelling (and) ingesting both two-stroke and four-stroke gasoline products, which then makes them feel better and more fulfilled."



Tony Marchese

Staying connected

Autonomy is separating the operator from the machine in ways the industry hasn't seen before, but on the other hand, turf equipment has never been more connected to the business and its managers.

Continued on page 18



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WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

Continued from page 16.

And while electrification and autonomy might not be fit for every operation, fleet management and software upgrades are much more digestible. Reeves, for example, has been a big advocate for John Deere's JDLink Modems, which connect to machines regardless of equipment or age and transfer machine and field data to his John Deere Operations Center account.



David Reeves

He says this kind of fleet management and machine monitoring system helped tremendously with labor hours and ensuring his mowers are where they're supposed to be. He even recalls one time when he beat the police to finding roughly \$100,000 in stolen equipment because it was hooked up to a GPS system.

On top of that, having new software that can send reports on job efficiency and equipment status means Reeves has been able to improve his operations automatically, without needing someone to waste time monitoring and logging all that data themselves.

"You're not relying on somebody to manually track when an oil change is due. We're now getting an email or a text message that says, 'Hey, this piece of equipment is due for an oil change,' and we can schedule that," Reeves



GOING IT ALONE
Robotic technology in the consumer space is trickling down to commercial applications.

says. "It's probably given somebody 10 hours back in their week. It's probably also saved us several thousands of dollars a year in unneeded or preventable repairs."

Similarly, Exmark has its recent Horizon360 software, a system that connects fleet management, diagnostic reporting and efficiency monitoring to its overall business management platform, showcasing how mowers and crews can be further integrated into the larger picture of running a landscaping company.

Horizon360 can help with fleet management, idle times, maintenance needs and more, all of which can significantly impact productivity and efficiency on a jobsite. But one issue Exmark's Mangnall sees with these connectivity improvements is that they're not fully adopted by the industry yet, or at least not being taken advantage of to the fullest.



Lenny Mangnall

"I think a lot of manufacturers already have a lot of this connectivity built and ready to go. It's just helping the industry understand how can they use this to (their) benefit, right? How can they use it to make themselves more efficient, more profitable?" Mangnall says.

Sprayers have also seen some recent software improvements, such as with Steel Green's Razor Tracking and Opti-Rate systems. Myers says Razor Tracking is another advanced telematics system that allows users to monitor where their Steel Green machines are and how they're being used. It can also set up maintenance reminders and intervals.

As for Opti-Rate, this technology is a pulse width modulation rate-controlled spray system that reacts to what the machine does to ensure a consistent spray rate and spread. Myers says through turn compensation and reacting to speed or elevation changes, the system gives operators peace of mind that the application is going down properly and efficiently, also saving on chemical costs.

"(The screen) also has a visual bar graph that gives you visual feedback of how the nozzles are pulsing and changing," Myers says. "That's also a built-in troubleshooting feature, because if something goes wrong with a nozzle or solenoid, it'll flash on the screen, give you a fault code, and then we can diagnose it on the spot and figure out what's going on."

Continued on page 20



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Continued from page 18

Old dog, new tricks

Technology is everywhere now, but sometimes it can be nice to return to ol' reliable and just take the mower for what it is. Despite all the electronic bells and whistles that are dominating the turf equipment dialogue, improvements are still constantly coming online for the more old-school, mechanical side of these machines.



DIALED IN The Opti-Rate system on Steel Green's sprayers helps operators ensure they have a consistent spray rate and spread.

Reeves says Site Landscape Development runs their zero-turns hard, and switching to John Deere's Michelin/Tweel airless tires has better kept crews running without the financial or time-consuming hassle of getting a flat.

"We've been doing that for five or six years already," Reeves says. "When we switched over, that was a game changer. We literally are not spending \$3,000 a month on tires (anymore)."

Mower decks have also been seeing some huge improvements, and multiple systems exist to increase the capabilities and versatility of each machine.

Greenworks' Marchese says 72-inch and 96-inch decks on mowers weren't as popular a decade ago, but now with the pressures that come from labor shortages, landscapers

are looking at larger sizes to do more with less people (He says he's seeing this size increase happen with autonomous mowers, too).

"It wasn't even a thought to some degree, and needs are changing for landscapers, because as they struggle to main-



PHOTOS: STEEL GREEN MANUFACTURING



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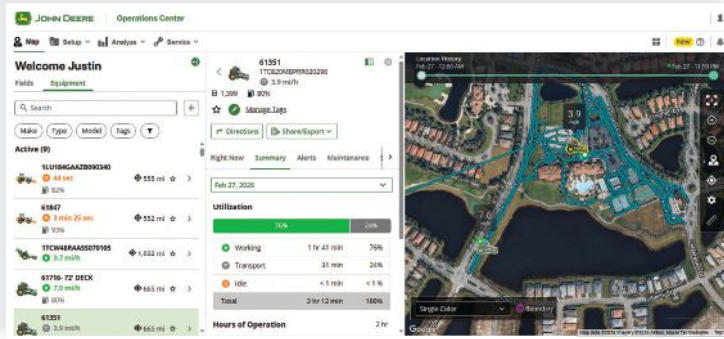


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IN CONTROL
John Deere's Operations Center software is among the tools giving contractors improved data about the machines in their fleet.

tain or attract employees, then they're going to need to do much, much more with the employees that they have," Marchese says.

Exmark has its own deck innovation with its Adapt technology, which enables quick and accurate deck rake adjustments from the operator position in a matter of seconds.

"That's something that has really created a buzz for us and been widely accepted as a great feature — great innovation," Mangnall says.

Ferris has aimed to set itself apart with its independent front and rear suspension system and deck compensation, which Richlen says is a massive benefit for operators using the machines on a daily basis.

"It takes the load off the operator. It takes the load off the chassis. It makes our machine more

durable," he says. "We also have deck compensation, and what that means is, as the vehicle goes over rougher terrain, the deck stays true to the earth. And that deck compensation is really part of the secret sauce of why we excel in the space to maintain our quality of cut even on that rougher terrain." 📱

Continued on page 22

PHOTOS: JOHN DEERE

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WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

Continued from page 21



LOOKING AHEAD
Experts say even
more technological
advances are
coming soon to turf
equipment near you.

IN THE FUTURE...

Mower and turf equipment innovations have changed the landscaping and turf care industries dramatically in the last few years. But even with all these changes, not every new technology has been fully adopted. Here's how the experts predict these technologies to grow in the near future:

Hand-in-hand growth. "As that technology and an adoption of electric becomes more mainstream, that's where I believe you'll see more adoption of autonomous. And in the interim, you are going to see more people getting into autonomous." — **Jeff Richlen, vice president of turf and consumer products at Briggs & Stratton and Ferris**

A silent job. "The final frontier for battery motors is really going to be the reduction of noise ... I see a future of large, autonomous mowers cutting in the nighttime in potential residential spaces, whether it's hotels or colleges, and not affecting the folks that live there. So there's a lot of space for innovation." — **Tony Marchese, senior vice president of sales, Commercial Business Group, Greenworks Commercial**

Very versatile. "(Autonomous machines) have to be able to work around trees, alongside buildings and on some complicated terrain. So, the technology is going to get there. It's getting better every year, but it's got to work in more than just these wide open areas. But I think the future is in autonomy."

— **Justin VanderHeyden, product manager, digital and autonomy, John Deere**



Justin VanderHeyden

Not quite there. "We're putting down corrosive material. So, you have to be a little more attentive and careful with what you're doing ... I think it'll be much slower growth in the lawn care industry for robotics/automation in the sprayer/spreader market. So, I would not expect it in the next two, three or four years." — **Caleb Myers, sales representative for Steel Green Manufacturing**



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BRAVE THE BILLBUGS

Billbug season is on its way, are you ready to handle them?

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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Last month's Turf School article featured a Q&A overviewing annual bluegrass weevils, a small, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic snout beetle known for being a headache for lawn care operators (LCOs).

This month, the beetle lessons continue with a rundown on billbugs, a pesky weevil commonly infesting lawns and killing the turfgrass around late spring when the days start to become warmer and longer.

ON THE GROUND

Brian Feldman, senior director of technical operations at TruGreen, has more than 30 years of experience in the agronomic and horticultural industries, and he says the best way to identify a billbug problem is to be up close and personal.

"Scout and assume the position. What position, you may ask? The position of kneeling down in the lawn and inspecting," Feldman says. "If you don't get into the lawn, you may miss the chance to see the symptoms and signs required to control this pest."

While there are multiple different billbug variants, the most common two for lawns are the bluegrass billbug

(*Sphenophorus parvulus*) and the hunting billbug (*Sphenophorus venatus*). Feldman says adult billbugs have a long snout that curves downward, and they're usually blackish grey or even brownish in color.

"The bluegrass billbug attacks cool-season grasses across the United States, including Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, fine fescues and sometimes non-endophytic tall fescue," Feldman says. "On the other hand, the hunting billbug prefers warm-season and Transition Zone grasses, mainly zoysiagrass."

And even though scouting for adults is important, it's the larvae that do the most damage. Feldman compares the larvae to a white grub, only smaller in size with a reddish head capsule and no legs.

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?

Billbug symptoms can often be misdiagnosed for drought stress, dollar spot and white grub damage, according to Feldman, meaning it's important to be on the lookout for the right side effects.

"Billbugs damage lawn grass when the larvae bore into the stem of the turfgrass plants. This causes the plant to wither and die. The larger larvae then bore into crowns of the grass, killing entire plants," Feldman says. "Lawns that have been injured by billbugs have grass that pulls up easily when tugged because of the hollowed stems and crowns. You might also find a fine, light brown 'sawdust' around the stem, crown and soil interface. This sawdust is the

frass of the billbug and a key indicator you have an infestation."

The result is initial brown spots that can turn into larger dry and patchy areas, resembling drought.

CONTROL THE PROBLEM

Preventative measures for billbugs can give LCOs peace of mind, and one of the best ways to ensure this is through good cultural practices. Proper mowing and watering techniques, for example, are reliable ways to support a healthy lawn that's more resistant to pest attacks, Feldman says.

For chemical management, he recommends professionally applied preventative control products designed to enter the grass systemically, preventing vast damage from the larvae.

"In addition, a control application made in the spring to control the adults has also shown to be another good defense measure, especially on lawns known to have infestations in the past," Feldman says.

Feldman also recommends selecting sod or seed that is resistant to insects and diseases.

"If you do not overseed your lawn annually, consider doing so to introduce improved varieties of grass that are more resilient and tolerant of insect damage," he says. "The best cool-season grass varieties on the market now contain endophyte, which is a natural symbiotic fungus that helps turfgrass survival, including tolerance to insects, drought and disease. The endophytes live inside the grass' tissue and produce alkaloids, which are toxic to feeding billbugs and many other surface feeding insects and diseases." 

The hunting billbug is a warm-season turf pest commonly found in the Transition Zone.



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More than just a conference

Custom Lawns' Dan Turner took away plenty from the LM Growth Summit, including the chance to cultivate meaningful industry relationships BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

As someone who enjoys being outside and engaging with people, Dan Turner, owner of Custom Lawns in North Ridgeville, Ohio, has always been a hands-on business owner. Part of that includes attending various industry events and conferences throughout the year to stay on top of his game.

"It's nice to keep up with what's going on in the industry, see new products and learn and understand what options are out there for us to better our processes," Turner says.

In December, Turner and his wife, Lisa, attended the LM Growth Summit in Orlando, Fla. This annual three-day event brings together lawn care professionals from across the country to meet with leading supplier partners, demo new equipment and products, network with other owners and attend educational sessions.



Dan Turner

PRODUCT FOCUS

The best part about the Summit for Turner was the one-on-one conversations with the supplier partners such as Envu, Atticus, PBI-Gordon, Nufarm and RealGreen. He says he appreciated the opportunity to talk with those companies about different products — both ones Turner has used and ones that might be a good fit for his rotation.

"It's a lot different than going to a traditional conference where a sales rep goes through a PowerPoint on stage with a list of products," Turner says. "This is a lot more one-on-one

and specific to what we use and want to use. Now, there's a lot more on our radar and other options to use compared to other products we've used in the past."

During the event, Turner also spent time with Jeff Harkness, founder and CEO of 3PG Advisors, a consulting and advisory firm in the green industry and another LM Growth Summit partner, allowing Turner to learn how they partner with companies. 3PG Advisors specializes in the landscape and facility services sector and works with companies on how to sell their businesses.

"It was nice to pick Jeff's brain and understand more about what they do and how that can help out companies down the road," Turner says.

During the Summit, Turner had the chance to check out new equipment from manufacturers like Steel Green Manufacturing and Stinger Equipment. His company has used pieces of equipment from these partners before, but Turner says it was nice to see some of their new offerings and add-on products that would allow them to get the most out of the machines they're using.

A relative newcomer to the industry, Lisa Turner was able to learn firsthand about the chemicals they use and other options available to them. She has a marketing background, so she says she was interested to hear how the other companies market their services and share educational pieces on their websites.

GET TO THE SUMMIT!

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INDUSTRY SECRETS

From their conversations on the golf course to ones over dinner, Dan Turner says talking with the attendees and supplier partners was extremely beneficial. Open, non-competitive networking enabled other owners to share valuable best practices.

"Everyone is very helpful with sharing ideas and some of their hidden secrets to stand out against the competition in their areas," he says.

He encourages other lawn care owners to apply and attend the LM Growth Summit if they have the opportunity: "It's 100-percent focused on our industry and what we do at Custom Lawns," Dan Turner says. "I only wish it lasted longer." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



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— KEVIN SALTERS,
OWNER, ROOT DEVELOPMENT LLC



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THE BIG ONE

A serene home oasis

BY TRACEY WALKER
LM SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR

LOCATION Utah County, Utah

COMPANY Sunline Landscapes

DETAILS This large residential estate project features integrated hardscapes, water elements, historic design references and long-term landscape maintenance. Sunline Landscapes serves as both the original construction partner and the ongoing maintenance provider.

Before renovations, the site had strong bones but lacked cohesion and usability.

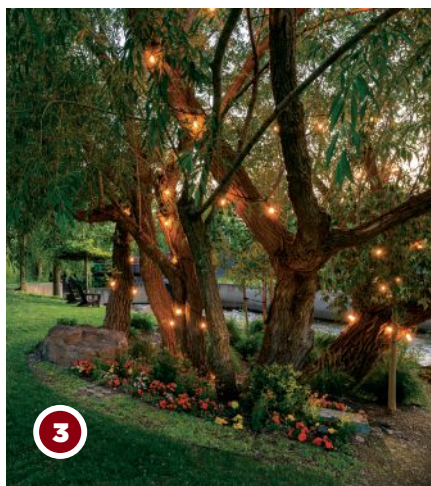
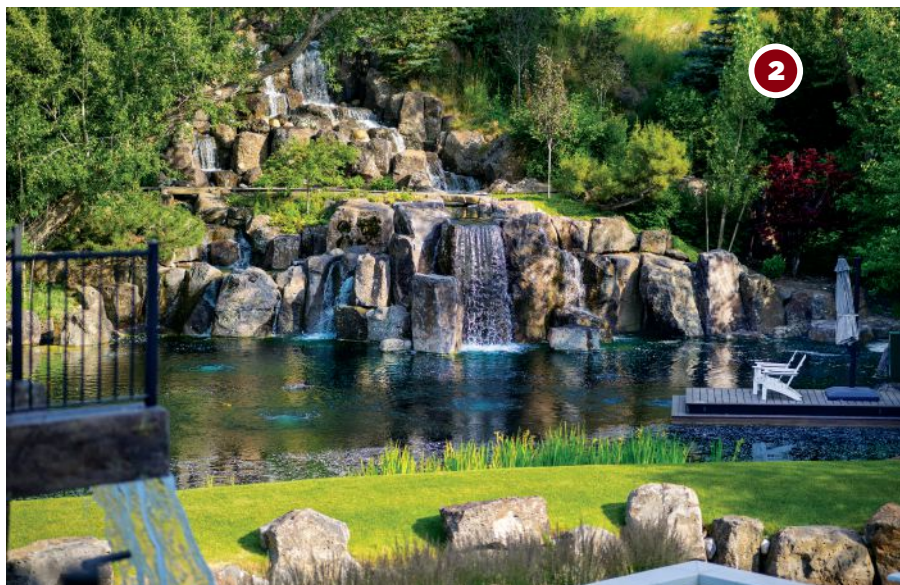
“The homeowners envisioned transforming it into a destination-style environment that felt immersive, private and timeless while still respecting the site’s natural and historical context,” says Taylor Anderson, systems development and growth manager at Sunline Landscapes.

Scale and complexity were the primary obstacles. The property size, existing mature trees, water features and architectural constraints required careful coordination. A public river runs through the property, and the city maintains a shutoff point that requires consistent access.

Sunline addressed these challenges through phased planning, specialty crews for specimen plantings and close collaboration between its construction and maintenance teams to ensure long-term performance.

To preserve the property’s heritage, the team softened the architecture with flowing plants, natural stone and traditional layouts.

In 2025, the National Association of Landscape Professionals honored Sunline Landscapes with a gold award in its Awards of Excellence program for its work on this project. 



Captions | **1.** With the property’s harsh angular lines, the goal was to soften them with plant material, including specialty specimen trees that offered flow and smoother edges. **2.** Sunline continues to maintain the property. The design team also coordinates with a trusted partner to manage the water feature so it remains balanced and fully functional. **3.** Trained trees provide natural shade, and personalized stone elements with the names of all of homeowners’ grandchildren offer thoughtful seating and reflect the family’s history. **4.** After the team worked with the client on a few options, they settled on synthetic turf under the playground to keep it clean and aesthetically pleasing.

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MAINTENANCE SHOP

TRAILER OR TRUCK?
Some landscape pros are eliminating trailer usage to increase simplicity.



On the road again

Stop losing time and money to yard and shop bottlenecks. Top landscape pros share strategies to speed up crew deployment and reduce indirect hours. BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR



Maximizing jobsite productivity is a constant topic of interest. However, the real bottlenecks often occur during the morning rollout and late-afternoon return. To tighten these daily transitions, seasoned industry pros share their methods for optimizing yard logistics and streamlining equipment maintenance.

START AT THE END

Many crews waste morning minutes on recurring tasks that should have been addressed the prior afternoon. So, Bob Marks, president of EMI Landscape in Macungie, Pa., treats the end-of-day transition as a disciplined ritual.

EMI crews follow a synchronized procedure upon returning to base. According to Marks, after refueling, each crew performs a 20-minute “truck reset,” unloading every machine, checking fluids and parts and installing sharpened blades. This ensures equipment is ready for a seamless departure the next morning.

“Every night, basically, the maintenance trucks are ready to go when (crews) leave,” Marks says.

This procedure reduces callbacks while helping Marks manage indirect time, those non-billable, unproductive hours that erode profit margins.

“The efficiency of having this routine done every day, while it is indirect time, it eliminates so much other indirect time that’s harder to track,” Marks says.

PUT A STOP TO STOPS

To smooth out inefficiencies, many contractors adopt fleet and equipment standardization to create predictability.

Ted Glaser, CEO of Lincoln, Neb.-based Summit Lawns, anchors his business in simplicity, using Chick-fil-A’s high-output business model as a blueprint.

For example, Glaser has nearly eliminated landscape trailers, instead investing in custom-built Ford F-150s that remain loaded 24/7 under protective carports. This shields equipment during the off hours from the elements, while a strategic interlocking parking pattern thwarts theft.

Summit Lawns also eliminated the morning detour to gas stations and convenience stores. On-site fueling and a fully stocked pantry remove the need for crews to navigate these retail bottlenecks, allowing crews to beat morning rush hour.

“If our guys leave the yard and immediately go to the gas station, they get stuck in line between every other contractor in the city,” Glaser says. “Now, our guys clock in, grab their food, their breakfast, and they’re out the door in 10 minutes.”

CLEAR A PATH

Operational efficiency also relies on minimizing physical movements. Too often, poor facility layout forces crews into time-consuming “touches,” a term Andy Hawley, branch manager at Watsonville, Calif.-based K&D Landscaping, uses to describe repeated loading and unloading of gear.

“Crews must have a lane of travel that moves around the yard as best as possible,” Hawley says. “You want to consider the most logical flow that reduces the steps it takes to get from the trailer to the equipment and then

get the equipment back to the trailer.”

To eliminate yard congestion, Ryan McCarthy, president and CEO of Wauke, Iowa-based RJ Lawn and Landscape, staggers departures in 30-minute waves. Mowing and application teams leave at 7 a.m., followed by landscaping crews at 7:30 a.m.

“I used to say our goal was in and out in eight (minutes),” he says. “Now, that’s more like 10 to 15 minutes, and if I can get half the company out of here in 15 minutes and then have the next wave come in, well, I can live with that.”

BUY-IN AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Crew buy-in is another catalyst for efficiency. Greg Witcomb, branch manager of Gold Coast Landscape Services in Lake Worth, Fla., uses a “slow-burn” strategy when optimizing operational logistics. Witcomb notes bombarding crews with sudden changes is counterproductive.

“You need crews to buy in and see that these things that you’re changing and restricting are working, and working in their favor,” he says of gaining acceptance of new operational models. “Your labor force must see the benefit from doing these things. That’s the key.”

Transitioning a workforce to new routines is a daunting task, but Witcomb says the secret lies in identifying internal influencers.

“If you get the buy-in from the ground-level leaders, then they’re going to get everyone else to follow suit,” he says. 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based journalist and frequent contributor who has covered various aspects of the green, horticultural, sports turf and irrigation industries for the last 20 years.

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STEP BY STEP

Getting the drainage details right

A French drain is often the best — and simplest — solution to drainage issues. Here's how to make sure your project pays off for you and your client

BY LM STAFF

You've spent plenty of time and effort making a customer's backyard a true showpiece. Innovative hardscapes. Attractive and site-appropriate plantings. Maybe you included an outdoor kitchen, a children's play area or a firepit. Everything screams "success."

And then it rains ... a lot. And both you and your customer realize there are drainage issues that need to be addressed immediately so they don't turn a dream project into an ongoing nightmare.

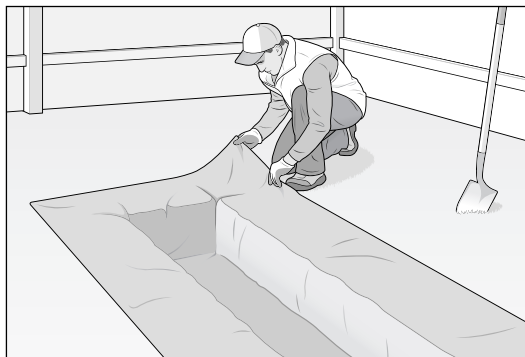
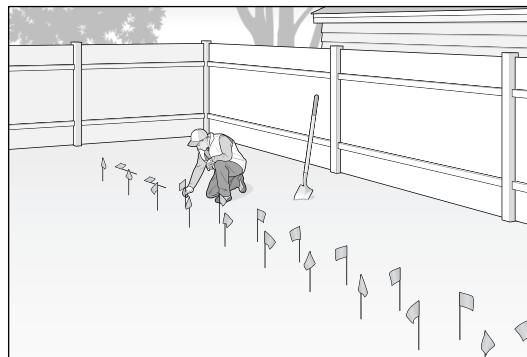
The simplest solution is often a French drain. Known by other terms — a drain tile, a weeping tile or even a trench drain — the purpose of a French drain is fairly straightforward. These solutions collect and redirect water away from an area or a structure. There are other options available to solve these pesky issues, including an infiltration trench, which captures water where it is and allows it to soak into the soil instead of being redirected elsewhere.

It's important to deploy the correct solution for your particular circumstance. In some instances, installing a French drain instead of an infiltration trench can violate municipal codes. In others, choosing the wrong drainage solution for the soil conditions present on the site can almost guarantee failure once the rains start falling again.

But when the time and place is right for a French drain, the installation process is often as straightforward as its purpose, as this month's Step by Step demonstrates. 🍷

➡ STEP 1

PLAN THE DRAINAGE STRATEGY. Before breaking ground, pinpoint the wet spots and a viable discharge point and verify local drainage requirements. Set the grade and lay out the drain path using a consistent positive slope (typically -one-percent grade) from the capture zone to the outlet. Use string and line levels or laser tools to help maintain accuracy.

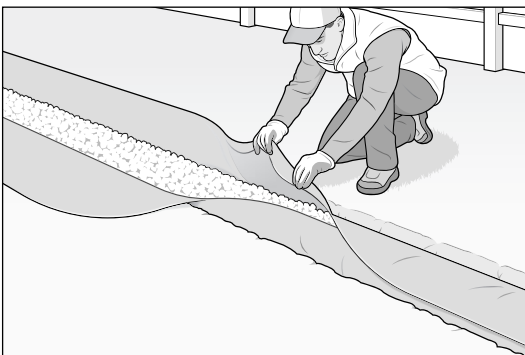


➡ STEP 2

EXCAVATE AND LINE THE TRENCH. Excavate to the planned width and depth (commonly 12-18 inches wide, 18-24 inches deep) while maintaining grade. Line the trench with nonwoven geotextile fabric, leaving excess at the edges so you can wrap it over the stone later.

➡ STEP 3

PREPARE THE BASE AND PLACE THE PIPE. Add a few inches of clean, washed gravel to create a stable base. Lay perforated pipe with holes facing downward to maximize infiltration, connect all fittings and check the slope again before covering.



➡ STEP 4

BACKFILL, WRAP AND FINISH. Cover the pipe with gravel up to a few inches of grade, fold the geotextile over to separate soil from rock and finish the surface with soil, sod or decorative stone tailored to the client's expectations.

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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Seeing the bigger picture

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Santa Cruz, Calif.

COMPANY K&D Landscaping

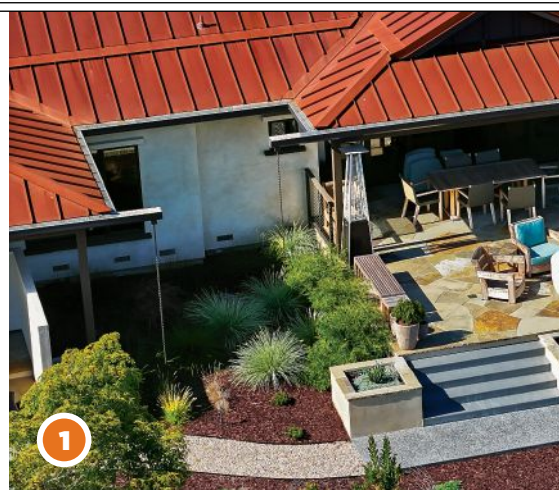
DETAILS If you asked the staff at K&D Landscaping, they would say they try to be much more than just a landscape contractor.

And that rings true for the company's "May Residence" project, a full property remodeling job that Jeremy Ross, vice president of construction, says considered everything from the home aesthetics to the unique mountaintop location with its final design.

"There's a lot of very Asian-inspired ... things on the site and integrated with the architecture of the home," Ross says. "So that was the original inspiration behind the design as a whole ... but also mixing in some modern (elements) with localized materials."

Some of those on-site features and updates include a Japanese torii-inspired gateway and a koi pond with an I-beam bridge leading to the front door.

The location meant there were possible complications, though, including using the land's



topography and some clever piping to ensure water doesn't run onto neighboring properties. And since native plantings didn't always match the theming, Australian options like grevillea also took center stage on this project.

After nearly a year of renovations, K&D took home a bronze award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

PHOTOS: K&D LANDSCAPING

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[**Herbicide**]



Captions | 1. The alternating finish on the pathways and the gold-toned masonry are two key elements to the project that stand out to Ross and Jason Paskus, K&D's residential project manager. 2. Paskus says the koi pond required some clever engineering to not only install, but to also keep the water flowing to prevent moss buildup. 3. Ross says Santa Cruz has tricky microclimates, causing the team to try a variety of planting options with different grasses. 4. After the project's completion, K&D did a 90-day establishment with a three-man crew to monitor water features, plumbing and tackle general maintenance.

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Modern water management ... and then some

Weathermatic's SmartCon 2026 put an emphasis on business management and industry trends in addition to high-tech irrigation talk

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When most people think about a conference for irrigation professionals put on by an irrigation company, they think of ... well, irrigation.

They assume the conference's program and the related conversations that take place there would focus on pipes, fittings, controllers, sprinkler heads and all the technology that it takes to run modern irrigation systems.

And yes, while the fifth edition of Weathermatic's SmartCon partner conference in San Antonio, Texas, this February featured plenty of opportunities for the 300-plus irrigation pros in attendance to talk shop, that's not really what this event is all about, according to Weathermatic president Lex Mason.

"We wanted to approach SmartCon as a business builder," Mason explains. "When you ask for someone's time — two days like this — to come together and get out of the normal routine, you have to give them more than just technical talk about irrigation. We wanted to stretch things and also give them tools that can improve the value of their business with the strategic initiatives that they choose to launch.

"For example, Jeff Harkness gave an incredible talk on what the impact on someone's business can be when they have a high-profit, high-performing irrigation division versus what happens when they don't. Not just from a cash flow perspective, but from an overall business value perspective. That's just an example, but we wanted

to bring together the content that really could help people at all levels of an organization."

That emphasis on creating an event that was about much more than the water running through pipes and sprinklers was apparent to the attendees who took time to travel to South Texas for SmartCon 2026.

"I describe (SmartCon) as a business strategy conference," says Robert Olsen, president and CEO of Goldenstate Landscapes in Camarillo, Calif. "There are a lot of conferences that are focused on technology and tools and things like that. I think this one's really about getting your mind straight about how to guide, build and manage an irrigation business correctly. It's really a business leadership meeting."

Amidst the business presentations that offered insights on everything from sales strategies and labor to acquisitions and customer service, there was still time for product talk and discussion of the innovations Weathermatic is bringing to the market, including an AI-powered irrigation manager called Link.

And even though his focus may have shifted from product to process over the years, Olsen admits it's the technology that first brought him to SmartCon back in 2022.

"When I started my company, I always pushed us to be really cutting edge with irrigation technology, and I had been feeling that we were falling behind on that," Olsen says. "I was looking for a way to improve on what we were doing, and that's when I discovered



WELCOMING WORDS Weathermatic president Lex Mason delivers opening remarks to attendees at SmartCon 2026 in San Antonio, Texas.

SmartLink (Weathermatic's remote irrigation management technology). I thought that was really the path to getting us back on track."

As much as attendees took away from the proceedings in San Antonio, they also gave back plenty, most notably through Weathermatic's philanthropic initiative called "Save Water. Give Life," which raises funds to drill clean water wells for communities in crisis around the world.

The effort is already well on its way to reaching company founder and CEO Mike Mason's goal of drilling 500 wells, and at SmartCon, attendees contributed more than \$10,000 to support three new wells in Peru. Keynote speaker Richard Rawlings — star of the Discovery Channel show "Fast N' Loud" and creator of the Gas Monkey brand — was so moved by those donations that he chipped in enough to cover another three wells.

"Today, you saw a group of wonderful CEOs and leaders from some of the top landscape contracting firms in the country come together to donate three water wells. That's profound," Mike Mason says. "There are children there that were hanging on by a thread that now are going to have clean, safe drinking water. Their lives are going to be transformed. It's really exciting." 🌱

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

How to end your winter season right

When winter begins to give way to spring, it's a good time for snow and ice professionals to review what worked and what didn't during the season

BY PHIL HARWOOD | CONTRIBUTOR

One of the great things about operating a snow business is its seasonality, which provides a great opportunity to fine-tune your operation during the off-season so that you're better prepared for next winter. This process begins with a comprehensive winter season wrap-up.

Properly wrapping up the winter season is critical because your performance next winter depends on it. It's one of the few aspects of a snow business we can control. We can't control the weather, but we can control our internal business processes.

Top snow pros know season wrap-ups require a comprehensive business review, not just equipment storage.

ASSESSING EVENT MANAGEMENT

One of the most important areas to review is how effective events are being managed and where improvements may be made. Event management involves three categories: pre-storm, during the storm and post-storm.

Pre-storm event management includes reviewing procedures for:

- Weather monitoring/weather alerts
- Employee and service partner notifications/stand-by
- Storm-specific strategy/decision-making authority
- Employee and service partner mobilization
- Storm-specific routing/assignments
- Customer communications/notifications

During-storm event management includes reviewing procedures for:

- Command/communication structure
- Issue identification/response/follow-up
- Customer communications/updates
- Employee and service partner quality assurance
- Incident reporting/information gathering
- Emergency response capacity

Post-storm event management includes reviewing procedures for:

- Service verification/documentation
- Issue assignment/follow-up/completion
- Customer surveys/feedback
- Materials inventory/reorders
- Certified storm totals/reports
- Billing summary/invoicing
- Insurance/legal claims

FUNCTIONAL AREAS

Wrapping up the winter season involves reviewing each functional area of your snow business to identify and close gaps over the summer months.

Areas to consider include:

- Sales team/goals/performance/closing rates
- Marketing budget/execution/ROI of marketing initiatives
- Account management/customer service/renewal rate
- Subcontracting/gross margin/quality assurance
- Scorecards/operational metrics/job costing
- Equipment selection/purchasing/decommissioning
- Compensation/bonuses/incentives

- HR/recruiting/onboarding/training
- Technology/performance/adoption rate
- Finances/budgeting/cash management/billing
- Admin team/support structures
- Peer group/networking
- Professional development/learning

CONTRACTS

Another important area to review at the end of the winter is your contracts — employment agreements, sales agreements, subcontractor agreements, purchase agreements, lease/rental agreements, etc. These contracts have implications that affect your snow business in terms of risk, cash flow and profitability.

A best practice for snow pros is to retain a qualified and experienced attorney who understands the business and can provide legal advice in addition to reviewing contract language. If you are looking for an attorney who can assist you, visit **SnowAttorney.com**.

WRAPPING IT UP

There are other considerations beyond the scope of this article. For this reason, the Snowfighters Institute — which brings together North American snow pros for professional development, peer-to-peer learning and networking — is hosting “Strategic Planning and Budgeting for Your Snow Business,” a virtual workshop on March 10 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST. The session features post-season checklists to help with planning for next winter.

Additionally, plans are in the works for GROW! Snow, an in-person event in 2026 focused on snow pros and industry suppliers serving that space. More details will be available soon; you can go to **growgroupinc.com/grow-snow-coming-soon** to receive information about this event as it becomes available. 

Harwood is a senior advisor with Tamarisk Business Advisors and a regular columnist for *LM*. You can reach him at phil.harwood@tamariskadvisors.com.

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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Tony Szczechowski

OWNER

PRO EDGE LAWN CARE

TOLEDO, OHIO

1 What should we know about Pro Edge Lawn Care, and how did it get started?

We're mostly a maintenance and snow removal company out of Toledo, Ohio. We're all commercial, no residential. We have 15 people in the green season, and in the winter, 34 people. We offer detail visits, bed maintenance, vegetation control, fall cleanups, fertilization, irrigation, mowing, mulching, pruning, spring cleanups, along with our winter services. I got my start like most people: Once I was able to drive, I'd borrow my mom's minivan and put my 21-inch mower in there. I'm amazed she let me do that, because it wasn't the most pleasant car when I returned it each time.

2 What's your favorite tool to get the job done?

I'm more behind the desk now, and I love my Microsoft and my financial planning tools.

3 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

I think it would be back in the winter of 2011. We were just getting pounded with snow. We needed another truck, so we went to buy one. My wife was on bed rest, and I'm two hours north of home. I'm with my right-hand man, and I say, "Oh, crap, I gotta go — she's in labor!" I hand him the check and tell him to make sure everything gets taken care of, and I'll see him back in Ohio. Let's just say I was pushing the speed limit to get back. But I also remember that taught me the importance of having a good team. Because I was in the hospital, I wasn't leaving. And the crew was sleeping in a camper at the shop just to get a couple of snoozes during the long snow event. The guys were workhorses. And I realized that I could really depend on them.

4 How do you celebrate the team for a job well done?

We do monthly team dinners on the fourth Tuesday of every month. We usually vote on locations, usually a local restaurant, but sometimes we'll do a cookout at the shop. And at the end of the year, we do a holiday party — the last couple of years we've done it at a bowling alley with a big arcade. Everybody's able to bring their families; it's a great atmosphere.

5 Tell me about your family, and what do you do for fun?

I've been married to my wife Erica for 19 years; we've got two boys, Grayson (age 15) and Reid (age 12). Just recently, I started collecting sports cards with my son, Grayson, and I had a partnership that lasted about two weeks before he fired me. He likes to buy single cards and make profits, whereas I'm more of the gambling man; I like to do what we call 'rip boxes' to try to hit that big card. The good news is it ended amicably, and we're both still collecting. And Reid, he's into Pokémon. We also like to travel. We go to Cleveland or Auburn Hills, Mich., play Topgolf and stay the night. 🏠

BEST ADVICE

"Know your numbers. I was part of LandOpt back in the mid-2010s, and I thought I knew my numbers. I realized I didn't know what I didn't know. I'd probably be out of business if I didn't join that group at that time."



PHOTO: PRO EDGE LAWN CARE

INFORMATION IS KEY

#67

How sector expansion drove success for Xquisite Landscaping

BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Knowledge is power, and for one commercial landscaping company, it's also resulted in growth and a team of empowered employees.

That intentional investment in expertise helped Xquisite Landscaping reach No. 67 on the 2025 *LM*150 list. One way it implements that is by hiring skilled union labor and growing their regional knowledge across their project management and operational teams, says Victor Romeiro, co-president of Xquisite Landscaping, based in Stoughton, Mass.

"Union expertise reduces risk, improves installation quality and delivers better long-term performance — outcomes that matter to the owners, developers and institutions we work with," Romeiro says.

Adding new layers of leadership has also helped the company scale responsibly and better support teams in the field.

"This approach has reinforced a sustainable growth model that is resilient to market shifts and aligned with the long-term needs of our clients," Romeiro says.

INVEST IN PEOPLE

Xquisite's employees are at the heart of the company's success, making employee retention especially critical. It invests in its teams by providing competitive pay, comprehensive benefits and long-term career support, Romeiro says.

"The result is stronger execution, higher client satisfaction and work our teams are proud to stand behind, which in turn fuels repeat business and sustainable growth," Romeiro says.



Victor Romeiro, left, and David Romeiro are co-presidents of Xquisite Landscaping in Stoughton, Mass.

In an industry where having the right people makes all the difference, the company's team will continue to play an important role in its growth going forward, says Keith Riquinha, vice president of production and operations.

"When we invest in key people, those key people deliver and allow us to expand on our capabilities," Riquinha says. "As our capabilities expand, the opportunities to showcase them will too."

THINK GREEN

With a growing demand for native and climate-forward landscapes, Xquisite has worked to deepen its team's plant expertise and sourcing capabilities. The company increased its dedicated plant buyer knowledge to better focus on the highly sensitive nature of plant procurement and source materials that are well suited to Northeast conditions. That's secured more complex and high-profile projects, including work pursuing LEED certification.

"The teams we've built contribute directly to securing landmark projects like the new South Station Tower and have reinforced our reputation as a contractor capable of executing sophisticated commercial landscapes at the highest level," Romeiro says.

Xquisite has also expanded into new sectors and regions, including schools, health care facilities and projects in other states like Rhode Island.

"As corporate and residential high-rise development became more susceptible to interest rate changes and supply chain disruptions, we intentionally focused on steadier sectors like schools and health care, which offer longer planning horizons and more consistent demand," he says.

ADAPT TO CHANGE

To address market fluctuations and supply chain issues, Xquisite strengthened its supplier relationships, improved internal processes, invested in technology and took proactive steps to adapt to industry changes.

The company's vendor relationships have helped it keep a close eye on products, and the vendors also give it plenty of notice if any of the materials might be volatile, Riquinha says.

"Looking ahead, procurement and fulfillment initiatives will be essential to our success," Riquinha says.

Romeiro prioritizes intentional growth over speed to maintain quality, leveraging union labor, green technologies and top talent.

"Xquisite Landscaping is two decades old, and we have increased the scale and complexity of our projects gradually, ensuring that our systems, teams and expertise evolved alongside that growth," Romeiro says. "That focus on quality has allowed us to earn the trust of leading contractors throughout the Northeast and build a strong reputation within the landscape development industry." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



BY BRYAN CHRISTIANSEN

The author is the CEO of Mariani Premier Group, the largest premium residential landscape firm in the U.S. Reach him at BryanC@marianipremiergroup.com.

The CEO's bookshelf: What private equity already knows about your company

In January, I wrote about three books that belong on a leader's shelf. This month, with M&A and company valuations top of mind for many, let's talk about three more, all written by one of the most consequential figures in modern corporate finance — Tom Copeland, co-founder of McKinsey and Co., a corporate finance practice and consultant to 200 companies in 34 countries.

Each book builds on the last, and together they answer three questions every owner and CEO should be asking: What drives my company's value? How do I invest wisely when the outcome is uncertain? And why does my company's trajectory matter more than its historical performance?

“VALUATION”

Co-authored with Tim Koller and Jack Murrin, “Valuation: Measuring and Managing the Value of Companies” is the foundational text of modern corporate finance and has sold over 200,000 copies across multiple editions. The *Financial Times* called it one of the best practitioners' guides to valuation ever written, and it remains required reading in corporate finance, private equity and M&A circles worldwide.

The book's central and enduring teaching is this: The value of a company is determined by its ability to generate free cash flow and by how efficiently it deploys the capital invested in the business.

For landscape company owners, this helps cut through the noise of EBITDA multiples that often dominate industry conversations. A company with strong, recurring revenue, disciplined working capital management, low customer concentration

“A buyer is purchasing your future, not your trailing-12-month performance. The price they are willing to pay is a direct function of how they expect performance to evolve under their ownership.”

and a capital structure that supports, rather than burdens, its cash flows is simply worth more — regardless of top-line size. Private equity buyers have internalized this framework completely; rather than paying for revenue, they are paying for sustainable, growing free cash flow.

“REAL OPTIONS”

Co-authored with Vladimir Antikarov at Monitor Group, “Real Options: A Practitioner's Guide” offers one of the most practical and powerful frameworks a CEO can apply to capital allocation and strategic investment decisions.

Using a decision lattice, the book shows how leaders can test a strategic hypothesis in stages, gather real data at each decision point and make an informed commitment to scale — or walk away — based on evidence. The key insight is that uncertainty is an asset, not a liability, when you manage investments as a sequence of options rather than an all-or-nothing bet.

Consider a question common to landscape companies: Does modernizing your fleet improve total cost of ownership and team productivity enough to justify the capital outlay? The traditional approach is to model it, debate it and go all-in ... or abandon the idea entirely. The real options approach says to test the hypothesis at one or two branches. Measure the outcomes and then make the decision to scale with real data in hand.

“OUTPERFORM WITH EXPECTATIONS-BASED MANAGEMENT”

Co-authored with Aaron Dolgoff, this is the book that most directly speaks to the M&A moment. Copeland and Dolgoff conducted rigorous empirical research and found something counterintuitive: Earnings growth alone is not correlated with shareholder returns.

A buyer is purchasing your future, not your trailing-12-month performance. The price they are willing to pay is a direct function of how they expect performance to evolve under their ownership. A company with strong current results but a stagnant operational narrative will be priced at a discount versus a company whose current results may be more modest, but whose operational trajectory is exciting.

A TIMELESS FRAMEWORK

These three books by Copeland form a complete, coherent and fad-proof framework for value creation. Free cash flow and capital efficiency drive value. Real options discipline turns uncertainty into a competitive advantage. And expectations-based management explains why trajectory matters.

The leaders who build the most durable and valuable enterprises are those who also understand the financial principles that govern how our daily work translates into enterprise value. 



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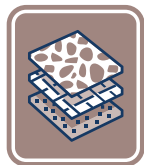
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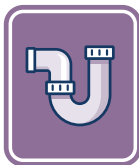
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BY JEFFREY SCOTT

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

Why some scale — and others stall

Over the years, we've tried to answer a simple question: Why do some entrepreneurs scale successfully while others do poorly or implode?

A recent episode of the "Money-wise" podcast got me thinking that it's not just intelligence or hustle. Something else is going on. Here are five specific traits that consistently show up in high-performing landscape entrepreneurs.

1 Stay curious — without chasing squirrels. The best entrepreneurs are intensely curious, lifelong learners — reading, listening to podcasts, talking to smart people and constantly questioning assumptions.

When something breaks, they ask "why?" instead of assigning blame. That's how companies innovate.

But intellectual appetite without discipline becomes distraction. Most entrepreneurs fall in love with the newest idea, be it a new tool, market, strategy or product.

The drive to explore must be anchored to your company's larger objectives to avoid the constant whipsaw of new directions.

2 Tap into a deeper drive. Successful entrepreneurs are driven to accomplish difficult goals and outperform expectations. Sometimes it comes from a chip on the shoulder or a desire to prove oneself.

Early life experiences often shape that drive.

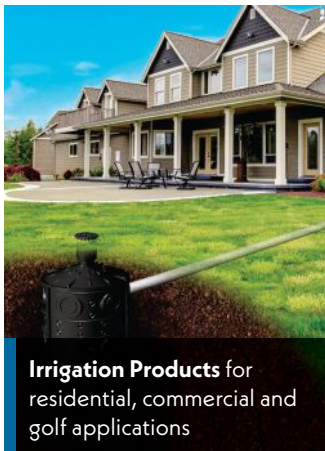
Research shows high achievers are energized by progress. But motivation based only on external validation — money, status, proving someone wrong — can eventually run dry.

Transform that chip on your shoulder into something that serves a bigger purpose — for your family, team, clients and your community.

3 Learn to trust and verify. Many entrepreneurs start companies because they crave autonomy. Some are unemployable. Others want control.



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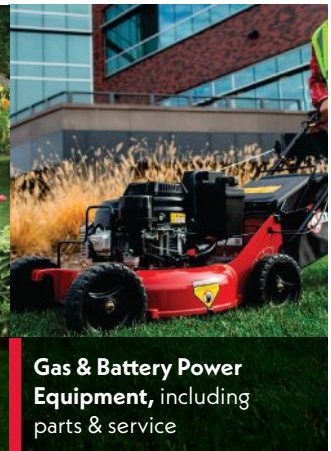
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That independence is useful early on. But if it doesn't evolve, it becomes a control addiction. Successful scaling requires confronting your inner control freak.

You need to move from "I'll do it myself" to "I'll build a team that can do it better." Trust, however, is not blind faith. It requires you to clarify expectations, define measurable outcomes, establish reporting rhythms and review performance without micromanaging.

4 Respond — don't react. Emotional regulation is one of the least discussed — and most powerful — entrepreneurial traits.

Owning a growing company is like living in a pressure cooker. I have been there myself and experienced all the pains:

- Cash flow swings
- Key employees leaving or stealing

- Market slowdowns
- Huge client screw-ups

It's too easy to react emotionally. High performers take a beat and respond with intention. You can't suppress emotion, but you must learn to channel it, because your nervous system influences your company's culture. Learn to use data to separate facts from fear, and lean on your leadership team to avoid overcorrection.

5 Get comfortable being uncomfortable. Successful entrepreneurs can live in ambiguity and make bold moves with incomplete information and challenging situations such as:

- Raising prices
- Hiring before it feels safe
- Entering new markets
- Having hard conversations

Their ability to gather just enough

data is key, while still calculating the consequences and financial impact before moving. On the flip side, don't get stuck in analysis paralysis. If you stand still, you stagnate and go backwards. Speed is critical.

How do you compare on these five traits?

1. Are you a lifelong learner, hanging out with smart peers?
2. Are you driven by a larger mission?
3. Do you trust, with systems for accountability?
4. Do you stay steady under pressure?
5. Can you grow in a state of discomfort?

These traits compound; develop them intentionally, and your success will follow. If you want guidance getting your business soundly to the next level, reach out. Let's have a conversation. 






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BY BOB MANN

The author is the director of state and local government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Reach him at Bob@landscapeprofessionals.org.

A common-sense approach to PFAS regulation

Here's an issue that came out of nowhere, completely unexpected. If you're not familiar with the acronym PFAS — and honestly, who has time to keep up with life's acronyms anyway? — it stands for “per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.” And now we understand why we need acronyms.

PFAS compounds have been around since the 1940s and are now found everywhere in the environment. Some common PFAS compounds you may recognize are surfactants such as Teflon and firefighting foam.

There is no agreement on an exact definition of what constitutes a PFAS compound, nor is there agreement on how many there are. The Environmental Protection Agency says, based on the definition they have established, that there are 14,735 compounds. However, another database using a broader definition lists 7 million different PFAS compounds.

You may have heard of PFAS being referred to as “forever chemicals” because they do not break down rapidly in the environment. Some PFAS compounds have been shown to have detrimental effects on human health and the environment, while others do not. Most PFAS compounds have never been through a thorough human and environmental risk review, as is the case with pesticides regulated under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

Allow me to illustrate how the PFAS issue can muddy the waters. In 2019, there was an outbreak of Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) in Massachusetts that resulted in 17 human cases and seven deaths. EEE is one of the arboviral diseases

“Demonizing all PFAS without differentiating between them robs us of the utility of those PFAS compounds that would pass a risk assessment.”

transmitted by infected mosquitoes and attacks the central nervous system of humans and horses.

The 2019 outbreak in Massachusetts required widespread aerial spraying of swampy areas that had an abundance of infected mosquitoes. This spraying was done according to a long-standing plan the state had developed to deal with similar situations.

And as you can probably guess, although there had been deaths, there were people who opposed the spraying. The opposition was such that the legislature passed a bill into law creating a commission to study the problem called “The Mosquito Control for the Twenty-First Century Task Force.”

When I read the bill, I noticed that there wasn't anyone earmarked to represent professional pesticide applicators on this task force. The legislature thought that was a great idea and amended the bill. Not long afterwards, I got a call that the professional pesticide applicator being appointed to the task force was me.

The task force met twice a month virtually since it was during the pandemic, and the dynamics of the group never really developed because we never met face-to-face. This became problematic when the day before a scheduled meeting, a story ran in *The Boston Globe* proclaiming “Toxic ‘forever chemicals’ found in pesticide used on millions of Mass. acres when spraying for mosquitoes.”

When the task force meeting convened the next day, some members

weren't interested in learning which of the 14,735 PFAS compounds were found, how much was found, if the PFAS was part of the active ingredient used or how the PFAS actually got there. No, they immediately zeroed in on the complaint that the state was spraying for mosquitoes and weaponized the issue to achieve their goal of not allowing the state to control mosquitoes.

As it turned out, there was no PFAS in the active ingredient — it was discovered that the PFAS had leached from the treated inside surface of the pesticide container — and the PFAS that was applied was such a small amount that it was below levels found in the environment already.

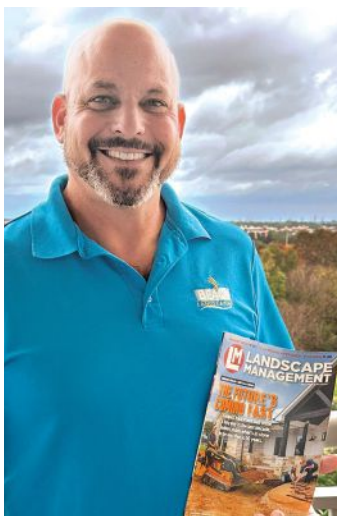
This incident foreshadowed future activism, but weaponizing PFAS is problematic. Because PFAS comprises thousands of compounds with unique toxicological profiles, a one-size-fits-all strategy fails. Demonizing all PFAS without differentiating between them robs us of the utility of those PFAS compounds that would pass a risk assessment. Second, other products that may have PFAS as a contaminant get swept up in the maelstrom.

My gut tells me that there's a pathway to remediating PFAS contamination by applying biosolids to lawns and landscapes. We see a great deal of research that indicates that plants have the capability to phytoremediate toxic compounds. We also know that soils can serve as a sink for certain contaminants as well. 🌱

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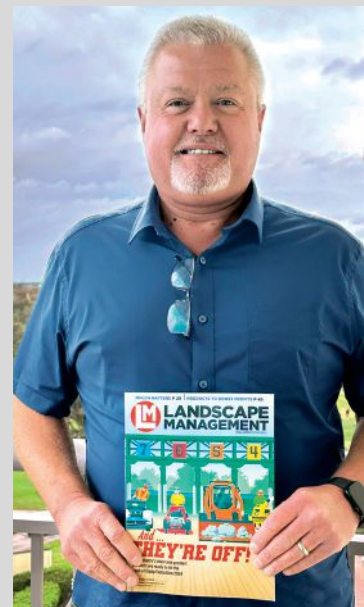
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BY PHIL HARWOOD, ESQ.

The author is an attorney with Tamarisk Legal Advisors, a senior advisor with Tamarisk Business Advisors and Snow Commander with the Snowfighters Institute.

What's the goal? Grow maintenance!

The simplicity of the goal is powerful: grow maintenance. Two words. Not a paragraph. No video required. Everyone gets it. Everyone plays a part.

We often fall into the trap of overcomplicating our business goals.

We devise elaborate strategic plans. We're proud of our 10-year, five-year, three-year and one-year plans.

We layer on "rocks" every quarter. We bury our people in goals. And then we wonder why nobody can breathe. Complexity is our enemy. Simplicity is our friend.

Earlier in my career, my company hired an up-and-coming business coach to work with our leadership team. His name was Gino Wickman (the Entrepreneurial Operating System, EOS, guy). At our off-site meeting in northern Michigan, Wickman led us through an exercise that completely changed my approach to leadership.

During this exercise, my team lovingly informed me that I was making their lives miserable because I had the mistaken belief that my superpower was to make things complex. I over-engineered everything I touched

“We often fall into the trap of overcomplicating our business goals. We devise elaborate strategic plans. We're proud of our 10-year, five-year, three-year and one-year plans. ... We bury our people in goals. And then we wonder why nobody can breathe.”

because it fed my ego. They pointed this out to me. Lovingly.

It hurt. But they were right. And then I discovered how freeing it was to not carry that burden around any longer. I was free to leave things alone. Or to put my energy into simplifying things. I quickly discovered that making things simple is much more difficult than making things complicated. This gave me a new challenge: make things simple, elegant and intuitive.

Back to “grow maintenance” ... I was recently invited to speak at GROW! 2026. If you're not familiar, this is the annual conference put on by Marty Grunder with Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group that attracts more than 1,000 other green industry professionals. This year's conference took place in Dallas and featured a tour of Complete Landsculpture, an award-winning, full-service landscape company.

If you visit the company's website, you'll see a beautiful backyard oasis at what looks like a resort. This is the backyard of one of the owners. In other words, the company is doing quite well. And yet, this company invited more than 1,000 people to

visit them in person. They shared with us what was working and what wasn't. They humbly acknowledged that they had things to work on. And they all shared a common goal for 2026: Grow maintenance. Powerful. Simple. Elegant. Intuitive.

Why grow maintenance? It depends on your perspective. It depends on your role in the company. An owner may wish to drive up the business value for succession planning purposes. A landscape designer may be focused on the long-term success of an installation that they designed. A maintenance production manager may be motivated by providing more career opportunities for the maintenance team. The Complete Landsculpture team each had their own unique way of explaining the goal.

The idea that a singular goal is powerful is nothing new. In fact, Gary Keller and Jay Papasan wrote a bestselling book on this exact idea, “The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results.”

As we consider our business goals or our succession plans, what is that singular goal? What is the one thing that will make the most impact? Do you know? Does your team know?

I guarantee you that every employee of Complete Landsculpture knows what the company's goal is. That's right. Grow maintenance.

Now go forth. 🌱



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Franchise frenzy

Do you have any experience in landscape franchising? Do you run your own franchise locations? If so, we want to hear about it!

The April edition of *Landscape Management* will feature our Franchise Guide, listing and profiling some of the industry's top brands. For more information and for a chance to be included in that edition, reach out to Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister (shollister@northcoastmedia.net) or Editorial Director Seth Jones (sjones@northcoastmedia.net) for more information.



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

The author is the CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, based in Dayton, Ohio. Reach him at marty@growgroupinc.com.



Choosing what — and what not — to outsource to AI

I've been in the green industry for 42 years now, which is hard to believe but true. When I started, we used U.S. mail, corded telephones and met most of our clients face-to-face. If we needed to tell someone something, we had to pick up the phone and hope that they were at home or in their office to answer. We used radios in our trucks to communicate with our crews when they were in the field.

If we hadn't embraced smartphones, email or software as it was introduced, I'm not even sure we could operate in today's world. I've seen the discourse currently happening around artificial intelligence happen for every new technology: Some people swear it'll be revolutionary, while others swear it'll end civilization as we know it. The truth has historically always been somewhere in the middle.

There's no question that AI can help landscaping company owners and leaders get more done in less time, but I think the caveat is that we must outsource the *right* things to AI.

It's important that we're still practicing skills we need and teaching them to our teams, such as:

Critical thinking and problem solving. AI hallucinates, and even if it can be useful in generating ideas, we need to still have the critical thinking skills to decide if what it's recommending is a *good* idea. It's important that we're still practicing good leadership and teaching less-experienced team members to think for themselves.

Developing others. There is an art to teaching skills to other people, and technology is a very long way off from replacing the hands-on work that our teams do. While AI may be able to help you design or document your training program, you still need to be teaching the skills (my favorite way is with a see-one, do-one, teach-one format).

Having real-world conversations. AI can't help you make genuine in-person connections. You need to get to know your clients and team members. An oldie but a goodie book on this is "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie, if you want to improve this skill.

On the flip side, every minute we save on an administrative task is time we could instead spend nurturing relationships with our two most important groups — our clients and our teams. So, here is how my team at Grunder Landscaping Co. uses AI to improve efficiency:

Bidding and estimating. We're using Bobbyard to streamline our bidding process on large commercial bids, and it's helping the salespeople focused on this work to get more bids out in less time.

Writing some communications. We're using AI to improve the professionalism of our communications. We use it to better organize and quickly draft things like our snow-and-ice-event emails to clients, responses to complaints or concerns, internal emails and meeting agendas. Importantly, we read everything and make changes before anything is sent.

My H.O.T. — honest, open, transparent — take is I worry that we lose authenticity if we use AI too heavily here. I don't want AI writing every email, cards to friends and family or even my LinkedIn posts. Instead, I want to encourage you to be yourself in those places, and use AI to research, learn, cure writer's block or improve your writing — not do it entirely for you.

Capturing meeting notes.

We use Fireflies.ai to take notes for our meetings. The notetaker automatically joins any Teams meetings we set up, and we can also open it on our phones for in-person meetings. It captures action items, provides a transcript for team members who weren't there and is a searchable record if we need to refer to it.

We're exploring more ways to use it, but at the end of the day, people still do business with people. Not with computers, AI, avatars or robots. Use AI to create more time in your day to spend on the things that matter.

This is especially important as the busy season gets into full swing, and if you're looking for more ways to improve your efficiency and reduce headaches, I encourage you to listen to some episodes of my podcast, "The Grow Show." We cover a wide range of topics to help landscape pros, all in an audio format you can listen to while driving between job sites. Find episodes online at growgroupinc.com/the-grow-show-landscaping-podcast. 🎧

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